



Research Article

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Modularisation of the University Curriculum in Zimbabwe: Perceptions of Lecturers and Students

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Abstract

The study explores the attitude of lecturers and students towards modularization in Zimbabwean Universities. A qualitative case study methodology involving the administration of questionnaires to fifteen students and in-depth interviews on six lecturers from three selected universities was adopted. The overall finding from the study participants was that the new teaching regime is efficient and has numerous advantages. The absence of proper consultation with stakeholders and dissemination of information regarding the educational reform raised concerns among lecturers. As a result, mixed attitudes were observed among both lecturers and students due to this weakness in the implementation process. The study therefore, recommends that the administration should reconsider the modularization system in order to address all concerns raised by educational stakeholders for a more effective implementation of the teaching and learning reform.

Keywords: efficacy, modularization, higher education, curriculum reform

1. Introduction

In the last two decades, universities have progressively adopted modular curriculum structures for the implementation of their curriculum. The system has drawn a lot of special interest in vocational technical education and higher education (Malik, 2012). The Zimbabwean Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education through Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE) embraced the use of the modular system in the Zimbabwean universities in 2021. The ministry considers the localized modular system as a home grown solution to the problems facing the Zimbabwean higher and tertiary education system. The universities have been suffering from unforeseen closures caused by student strikes and unforeseen disasters like the COVID19 induced lockdowns.

Globally, modularization involves the fragmentation of the curriculum into small, independent modules or units that are not necessarily sequential and are typically brief. Students receive credit upon completion of these modules, which can eventually result in a qualification once a specific

number of credit points is reached (French, 2015). Although there are different types of modular academic programs designed for different purposes and using different terminology, Josef and Mekuwanint (2015) argue that all modular systems make learning measurable and quantifiable. It claims to be based on the idea that knowledge can be divided into units. Unlike traditional linear study programs that follow a set of subjects, modular programs consist of individual, self-contained modules that can be studied in any order and at different speeds.

According to Degene (2019), program modularization involves breaking down the content of a program rather than focusing on time framed achievements. The curriculum reform marks a shift from a time-based learning system to a credit-based system, Degene explained. However, modularity is also associated with providing knowledge in smaller and easier to understand parts, making it suitable for condensed and intensive modes of teaching.

Rich and Scott (1997) note that in the UK, some universities started using modular systems as early as the 1990s. This was so because neither administrators nor lecturers were very keen on semester systems. The lecturers preferred to teach short modules. In contrast, Australian universities on the other hand, primarily use a semester system and seem to prefer a linear, time-based curriculum that they believe allows for more content to be covered compared to a modular structure. Ethiopia embraced modularisation system to curriculum implementation in 2013. The major reason, according to Yoseph & Mekuwanint (2015), being the need to support production of graduates that are ready to work internationally in varied job opportunities where skilled professionals are required. This is achieved through two ways. Firstly, the modular system is organized around competences. As a result, the curricula produces competent graduates. Because of the fragmented courses in a traditional education system, students who drop out of university would have wasted their time because they are unable to receive certification in any of the competencies. In the case of modularisation the university drop out can be employed on the basis of acquired competences or even continue with their studies in any university of their choice.

The second reason is that, despite the fact that student workload is critical to both academic and professional success, it is not addressed in the traditional curriculum. Only the contact hour that the teacher employs in the classroom is stated. Thus, one of the main components of modularization is the acknowledgement of student workload (Donnelly & Fitzmaurice, 2005).

Despite its sincere introduction, Ethiopian modularization has encountered numerous difficulties. The primary obstacle is the matter of time. According to Malik (2012), teachers are supposed to evaluate students' learning formatively in a curriculum that is modularized. Nonetheless, the fundamental tenet of student evaluation must be ongoing assessment given the current trends in teaching and learning. To increase performance and accomplish the goals for which the module is designed, students must undergo regular assessments and receive timely, relevant feedback. In Ethiopia, however, both professors and students have stated that time constraints prevent research and group projects, let alone efficient ongoing assessment. Instructors ultimately rely on in-class assessments to receive marks from students (Dejene, 2019)

Zimbabwean higher education system, introduced modularisation in 2021 to replace semesterisation, which in turn, was introduced first at conventional universities in 2000. Semesterisation divides the academic year into two time-based teaching periods, whereas modularization divides it into smaller, content-based learning periods where students complete assignments and tests quickly. In the Zimbabwean context modularisation and semesterisation operate concurrently. The academic year has two semesters and each semester is divided into two quarters to accommodate the modular system. Gora (2023) further explains that modularisation is a system of learning where teaching and learning semester modules shall no longer be taught for the entire duration of the semester but shall rather be taught and examined in about six weeks of every semester. Whilst administrations are praising the system, lecturers and students have mixed feelings.

In his speech on the 2022 graduation ceremony cited by Gora (2023), the University of Zimbabwe Vice Chancellor, Professor Paul Mapfumo praised the modular system stating that because students receive feedback and grades instantaneously, as opposed to the semester model where tests

are typically returned much later, it improves retention and pass rate. He was, nevertheless, quick to highlight that there is an outcry from lecturers who seem to be poorly adapting to the change as compared to students. Some lecturers, as he indicated, have actually left the system to avoid implementing the modular system. To him, the reason being that some of the lecturers suffer from inertia, they can only function in their comfort zones. Dr. Jeffrey Kurebwa (2022), a lecturer at Bindura University of Science Education, a different state university, had similar thoughts, stating that the modular method was implemented to minimize lecturer-student interaction time while maximizing learning. Regretfully, several lecturers were opposing the system (Gora 2023).

In the midst of this contention, the ministry through the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE) has ignored the concerns of lecturers and encouraged all universities to migrate to using this mode of curriculum implementation. There is need therefore to carry out a research to understand the challenges being raised by lecturers as well as students on the new system and come up with recommendations which can make the system more favorable to lecturers and students.

2. Statement of the Problem

The introduction of the modular system in Zimbabwe's universities was praised for its role in increasing students' content retention, pass rates, timeous feedback and grades as opposed to the semester model. While it has to be emphasized that successful implementation of any curriculum reform depends significantly on the teachers' commitment, attitudes, receptivity and unwavering support (Chi-Kin Lee, 2000; Thomas, 2012), during the implementation of modularisation in the country's universities, resistance to change by some lecturers has been noted. In order to improve and get maximum benefit from modularization, this study sought to find out lecturers' and students' perceptions towards the curriculum reform initiative.

3. Research Questions

1. What are the university lecturers and students' understanding of the modular system?
2. What are the university lecturers and students' views/perceptions about the advantages and disadvantages of the modular system?
3. How can the modular system be improved as viewed by university lecturers and students?

3.1 Review of related literature

There are four components to the review of related literature focusing on theoretical framework; the history of modularisation; attributes of modularisation and finally the concept of modularisation in Zimbabwe.

4. Theoretical framework

The Social Judgment Theory (SJT) developed by Sherif and Hovaland (1961) guided this study. The theory provided the theoretical lens for establishing lecturers and students' perceptions on modularisation. The two authors claim that an individual's pre-existing attitudes also known as the anchor, influence their perception of a message or information presented to them. Expressed differently, one's anchor position influences how they judge or evaluate a phenomenon and their attitudes towards it.

Sherif and Hovaland (1961) elaborate that the anchor can influence an individual to accept, reject or be neutral about the message or information they receive from a sender. Thus, one's perception of a particular phenomenon can be placed on a continuum of three latitudes: latitude of acceptance, latitude of rejection and latitude of non-commitment. The latitude of acceptance includes all those ideas or range of positions on an issue that one finds acceptable, resulting in one

developing positive perceptions of the phenomenon presented to them. The latitude of rejection covers information that one finds objectionable or unacceptable. This latitude often influences an individual to hold negative perceptions of a phenomenon in question. The third latitude is non-commitment in which one judges a phenomenon as neither acceptable nor objectionable. The individual neither accepts nor rejects the idea and therefore remains neutral. In the context of the SJT, it can be argued that pre-existing attitudes or the anchor position is the central determinant of how humans judge and perceive new phenomena presented to them.

In the context of the SJT, modularisation represents a new university curriculum implementation model which ZIMCHE (the sender) expects both public and private universities (the receivers) in Zimbabwe to adopt. Prior to the introduction of modularisation, the semesterised curriculum model was the *modus operandi* in all universities. From the perspective of the SJT, the semesterised university curriculum framework represents an anchor position, which can influence lecturers, and students to accept, reject or hold neutral perceptions of modularisation. It is for this reason that the SJT was considered the most appropriate theoretical framework for establishing students and lecturers' perceptions of modularisation.

4.1 The history of Modularisation

Nobody seems to be quite sure about the origins of modular instruction and the modularity wave, as demonstrated by Dochy et al. (1989) in *A Revised Guidelines for Curriculum Modularization in Ethiopian Higher Education* (2013). While some cite the first uses in American and Canadian colleges, others search dictionaries for meanings. It seems that there are many who look for the theories and psychological studies that justify modular training as the basis for modularity.

The Engineering Industry Training Board in Britain adopted the modular system for craft training in 1968, which is when the system was first mentioned (Roberts, 1968 as quoted in Cooke & Dinkelmann, 2001). Others point out that American higher education was the first to implement modular education. Nonetheless, every academic concurs that there has been a significant amount of variation in the definition, application, and adoption of modular education across the globe (Dochy, Wagemans, and Wolf, 1989).

One of the most popular and well-recognized methods of instruction in the United States, Great Britain, Australia, and other western nations is modular teaching. Furthermore, practically every topic, including the social sciences, computer education, and the natural sciences and medical, uses modular teaching. Modules are used to teach a wide range of courses (Farooq, 1997). Notwithstanding differences in its conception and evolution, efforts were made to link graduates' competencies with market demands by aligning with competences and competence-based education. Therefore, the modular approach necessitates replacing the outdated knowledge-based curriculum structure with a competency-based curriculum that emphasizes the identification of professional/vocational skills, job-specific abilities, and transferable skills a graduate may have after completing a program.

According to Burns (1971), modularization can be used in an individual learning environment. It is feasible to build a variety of study systems in which modularization may be useful based on different insights gleaned from learning theory. The self-study packages are the most noteworthy. The Open University holds a prominent position in the Netherlands when it comes to creating customized study packages for online learning.

Hybrid methods of in-person training are also possible. Realizing that a well-balanced curriculum consists of a range of instructional strategies, such as in-person instruction, group projects, media use, and individual study, all of which are integrated into a seamless whole, is the first step. Thus, it's probable that Dochy, Wagemans, & DeWolf (1989) asserted that the distinctions between a traditional and a modular learning environment aren't always as great. Between fully personalized self-study programs and traditional in-person education courses, there are numerous hybrid variants.

Modular systems are categorized into vertical and horizontal modularization by Luko (2014). The most common kind of modular system up until recently was the horizontal one, which divides educational materials into "modules" according to certain principles and places them on the same level and inside the same school area. In order to fulfill the skill requirements, the student can use the vertical system to borrow the courses from the group ahead of him that are most pertinent to him.

4.2 *Positive attributes of Modularisation*

The research identifies seven distinct attributes of modularisation, which makes it favorable to curriculum implementation.

4.2.1 *Student diversity, flexibility and mobility*

French (2015) states that today's university clientele does not only consist of school leavers but also professionals with different educational needs. When it comes to curriculum organization, a well-designed and built modular curriculum may provide pupils with greater flexibility and variety than other, more traditional methods. One of the key benefits of unitized qualifications is flexibility in the quantity and schedule of modular tests, which has numerous advantageous effects (Ali et al., 2010). Students can enroll in modules at any moment that their teachers deem most suitable for them, according to proponents of vertical modularization. The assessment can be aligned with the course's learning objectives. The option to spread out exam dates rather than condensing them into a short window at the end of the semester is expected to lessen the stress that many university students feel when taking exams.

4.2.2 *Student choice and self-management*

A modular curriculum, according to Thomson (1988) and Gayan et al. (2016), encourages teachers and students to develop a sense of ownership of the study plan. Lecturers can collaborate on the creation of the innovation or its implementation in the classroom, and students can assume complete accountability for their education by setting up their own study plans and evaluation procedures. Both parties concerned ought to become less disenchanted as a result of this. This advantage mainly relates to vertical modularisation. However, when one looks at the Zimbabwean horizontal hybrid modularisation system, this advantage is not enjoyed by the students as they do not have the liberty to choose courses, the courses are planned for them at departmental and faculty level. There is little if no liberty of choice of what to learn and when to learn it.

4.2.3 *Improved student-teacher relationship*

According to Goldschmid & Goldschmid (1993), student-teacher relationships are enhanced by modularization. Teachers and students will develop a productive working relationship as they work together to establish short-term goals, planning, and teaching approaches. Teachers and students must collaborate closely to ensure understanding and exam readiness due to the condensed learning period and impending exams. However, modules are occasionally blamed for impeding the teacher-student bond since they require teachers to constantly prepare for assessments, taking up time that could be spent attending to students' needs (Thomson, 1988).

4.2.4 *Spread of assessment*

Another attribute of the modular system is assessment style. The assessment is spread throughout the course. This inspires the student to work hard throughout the learning period. Kamakshi (2011)

argue that modularisation allows students to write examinations while the work is still fresh in their minds and this allows them to plan their time efficiently. Because at any given point in the academic year students will be preparing for examinations, the system promotes focus and reduces stress. To add on to the advantages of modularisation on assessment, working with small collections of concepts, issues, and deadlines at a time, according to Guro & Webner (2010), stipulates that students have adequate resources and assistance in their classes. One further advantage of modular examinations is that pupils receive feedback on a regular basis. According to McClune (2001), one perceived benefit of modularization is that it allows teachers and students to provide regular feedback on performance, which can be used to determine the students' areas of need for improvement. Others contend that taking modules shortly after they are taught reveals misconceptions and flaws, but at a stage when they can be fixed in the course.

Studies, however, show that in order to enhance performance in the future, feedback needs to be designed to promote error correction by carefully taking into account the preliminary knowledge relevant to the job (Black and William, 1998). Furthermore, some underachievers can find it challenging to maintain their motivation in the face of criticism and having to retake modules, which could widen the performance difference between high and low achievers. This phenomenon is known in education as the Matthew-effect (Merton, 1988). Making plans for future study and course completion is made possible by the modular curriculum, which also benefits students who wish to retake courses (Hayward and McNicholl, 2007).

4.2.5 Improves focus of teaching and learning

The argument for modularization is that it provides equal weight to all curriculum components, not just those that are included in test syllabuses. Nonetheless, detractors contend that the modular course increases the amount of time spent "teaching to the test," undermining enrichment activities and time dedicated to subjects not covered in the test (Thomson, 1988). The continual repetition of modules might get boring for lecturers who teach a fairly limited variety of subjects. On the other hand, it is important to note that the fact that in a modular system exams are always eminent makes both the lecturers and students remain focused on the course outline and avoid unnecessary divergence (Thomson, 1988).

4.2.6 Reduces teacher's workload

Teachers must bear a heavy initial workload while using a modular method since it "may involve a considerable investment of time, preparation, and energy." One concern about how modularization may affect instructors' workloads is this; Some fear that in addition to their already hard workloads during the course, teachers' time-consuming non-teaching tasks (such as research, paperwork, and administrative duties) would increase (Warwick, 1987). Other instructors claim that compared to a traditional curriculum, a substantially larger amount of time is spent on administration and evaluation rather than instruction (Thomson, 1988).

4.2.7 Shorter duration of examinations

Time spent on administration of examinations can be considered as Another benefit of modularisation (Gray, 2001). Most modular examinations, though of the same duration with the usual, take less time to administer. This is because students will be sitting for less papers at any given point in time. As a result, it is possible to maintain a higher level of focus during the test, which will improve performance. This will have a cumulative effect over all modules, perhaps improving the final grade.

In summary scholars who advocate for modularisation highlight flexibility, frequent feedback, student motivated, an assessment load that is distributed more fairly throughout the year gives

students more time to organize their coursework and fosters a sense of ownership, which lowers student dissatisfaction. The advantages of this learner centered system are biased towards the students hence misconception on the part of the lecturers.

4.3 Negative attributes of modularisation

Those who oppose modular assessment assert that its drawbacks cause the general public, college tutors, and admissions officials to lose faith in the overall qualification (Hayward and McNicholl, 2007).

4.3.1 Fragmentation of content

One of the main arguments against modularization is the worry that students will study a certain subject in four or six weeks and then forget it. Furthermore, there is a risk that learning would be fragmented and that the experience will be inconsistent, which could jeopardize what is known as "synoptic understanding" (Hayward & McNicholl, 2007). According to Thomson (1988), pupils are deprived of the chance to realize their full potential due to the short duration of the modular course.

For instance, Tan (1992) discovered a significant detrimental effect on medical students' comprehension of physiology when it was taught and evaluated in a modular format; instead of developing a deep conceptual understanding of the subject, students adopted a surface reproductive approach to pass their exams. They would therefore probably have trouble connecting theory to practice in the future.

4.3.2 Too much focus on assessment

Frequent evaluations also run the risk of making assessments the focal point of the learning process from the beginning to the conclusion. While Hodgson and Spours (2001) stated that teachers waste a great deal of important learning time preparing for exams, Priestley (2003) reported that modularization results in more teaching to the test and a "climate of cramming."

4.3.3 Limited learning time

Some contended that the implementation of modularization might intensify the difficulty of certain courses, given that candidates are required to work and undergo evaluations during their initial courses taken early in the first year. This could potentially disadvantage them due to their relative immaturity or limited subject-matter experience. Modular syllabuses are no easy option, as all modules are assessed to full standard without allowance for maturation, including those taken at an early stage in the program (Welsh, 2012 & Davies, 2006).

5. Modularisation in Zimbabwean Universities

Modular learning in Zimbabwe involves dividing the semester into two quarters of approximately six weeks long. Teaching and learning in two or three courses is done in each quarter followed by an examination at the end of the six weeks. The second quarter resumes soon after the examinations to complete the semester. As previously mentioned, the University of Zimbabwe was the first institution in Zimbabwe to implement online modularization of higher education following the unexpected national lockdown caused by COVID-19 (Gora, 2023). Due to the frequent and unexpected closures that Zimbabwean institutions were facing at the time, the system was improved when classes began in order to safeguard the academic progress made during the semester. Other universities like Great Zimbabwe University (GZU), Bindura University of Science Education (BUSE), Chinhoyi University of Technology (CUT), Midlands State University (MSU), Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University (ZEGU) and

National University of Science and Technology (NUST) have followed suit tailor making the system to suit the needs of their students.

As explained in Gora (2023) the modular system in Zimbabwe works hand in glove with semesterisation. The academic year is still divided into two semesters then each semester is divided into two quarters. Students do not really choose the modules they want to study each semester. This is done at faculty and departmental level hence there is no individualised teaching and learning of courses in the hybrid system. It also borrows from the Australian approach which embraces different types of teaching and learning methods; face to face, online and self-study packages. If we would borrow from Luko (2014)'s classification of modularisation, then the Zimbabwean modular system would be defined as the horizontal modular system where students' courses are planned at faculty and departmental levels and not at individual level.

6. Methodology

This study used an exploratory case study research approach. When the goal of the research is to gain fresh understanding of a topic that has not received enough attention, an exploratory case study design can be helpful (Ferreira & Lind, 2023). The reason the researchers selected this approach was that it permitted a thorough and unconstrained subjective analysis of the lecturers' knowledge, attitudes, and experiences with modularization (Lekunze & Strom, 2017). Furthermore, the exploratory case study was ideal for this study since it allowed for an analysis of particular instructors and students to bring up concerns about the modularization of the university curriculum that affected them.

A total of twenty-one (21) participants; six (6) university lecturers and fifteen (15) students from three state universities participated in the study. The researchers used purposive sampling to select both lecturers who are implementing the modular curriculum and class representatives of the affected classes. To preserve participants' identities and prevent information from being linked back to them, the study did not utilize their real names in accordance with ethical guidelines.

Interviews were conducted with the chosen participants. The purpose of the interview guide was to enable participants to freely discuss the difficulties they had and their experiences adopting the modular system. Through pilot testing the instrument with two students and one lecturer in a setting akin to the research study, the interview guide was verified. The interviews were conducted by the researchers in a month. The digital recorder and notes were utilized to gather the data from the interviews while adhering to the ethical principle of informed consent.

7. Findings

The findings are presented in thematic form as developed from the responses given by the participants. The three themes are:

1. Positive perceptions of modularization
2. Negative perceptions of modularization
3. Neutral perceptions of modularization

7.1 Positive Perceptions of Modularization

Through their responses, some participants revealed a positive perception of modularization. These responses were divided into four sub themes.

1. Manageable workload

Responses from both lecturers and students confirmed Warwick, (1987) & Kamakshi (2011)'s assertions that modularization allows them to have manageable workloads and spread of assessment. Since students will be doing two or three modules at a time it means less load for both the lecturer

and the students. One student revealed that,

"Before the introduction of this model, it was very difficult to concentrate on anything. We were doing four or six different courses at the same time per semester. We would spend the entire day in different lectures, have six or more assignments due at once, and sometimes wrote two tests in a week.

Another student commented that,

Due to modular system, there are one or two lectures per day. In as much as we spend longer session in each module, it is easier for us to concentrate because we will be focusing on the same subject matter and competence. In the modular system we generally have two or three assignments at a time, and the tests are now evenly spaced. It has made life easier for me. I have no trouble understanding the material and can appropriately study for tests.

One of the interviewed lecturers preferred teaching two modules per quarter as it enables her to focus on fewer classes. She said,

... I do not mind teaching in every quarter. Taking 2 modules per time gives me ample time to prepare for my lecture, mark and assess students and create a relationship with my classes.

Another lecturer indicated that,

My idea of manageable workload is on the part of teaching in one quarter then concentrating on the other aspects of the job in another quarter. So if the system allows me to have this arrangement then I will be comfortable.

The majority of the respondents raised the concept of manageable workload. However, lecturers differ in their perception of manageable workload. One group prefers teaching less modules in every quarter whilst others would rather teach all their course in one quarter then concentrate on other aspects of education 5.0 in the other quarter.

2. Time management

Closely linked to the first perceived advantage of modularisation was time management. Because of manageable workload, both lecturers and students agreed that modularisation allows them to have a balanced lifestyle. A student who is a mother of two claimed that,

I have improved in terms of my life-study balance. I can now spend time with my family as well as concentrate on my studies...

Another student who is into sports applauded the introduction of modularisation stating that,

This new system allows me to participate comfortably in sports and clubs. This is because I will be doing two or three courses per quarter. This allows me to comfortably manage my time. It allows me to excel in both my academic and sports.

The issue of time was also supported by lecturers. One of the lecturers said,

... When implemented well, the system frees up lecturer time for other, more often neglected aspects of Education 5.0, such as industrialization, research, university and community involvement, and innovation.

Another lecturer concurred with the above sentiments. However emphasis was on proper planning of the system,

... if well planned it would mean a lecturer would teach during one quarter and use the other quarter for the other four aspects of Education 5.0.

Whilst critics of this perception can argue that, covering the same content over a shorter period implies that lecturers and students had to meet more frequently each week, the strength of the point lies on lecturer and students' focus on less modules

3. Enhanced focus on fewer modules

Closely connected to the point discussed earlier, both lecturers and students indicated that modularisation has led to higher pass rates. This has come as a result of the high concentration on less modules at a time. One participant said,

I can fully apply myself in a particular area. The system enables me to excel during those three to four weeks that I study a module and sit for the examination."

One second year student responded saying,

In my program we do two courses per quarter. I am happy that I excelled in both modules. I give credit to the modular system which allowed me to focus on few aspects at a time.

One lecturer confirmed that modular learning encourages students to be focused and this results in quality results. The lecturer said,

'Modularisation allows students to focus all their attention and energy on one course or, at least, fewer courses compared to the semester model. I have seen an improvement in the quality of results in my modules.'

The above was supported by another lecturer who pointed out that,

Modularisation enables a student to have adequate resources and support in their courses when they are working with smaller collections of concepts, challenges, and deadlines at a time. This works especially well for "boring" or mandatory modules that students don't find interesting.

The above findings confirm Gray, (2001)'s assertion that shorter examination periods lead to higher concentration and quality results.

7.2 Reduction of examination stress

Examinations are associated with a lot of stress. Preparation is generally grueling and it is even worse with increased number of examinations to be written. Modularisation divides the workload into two hence the examination load at any given time is half of what it used to be with semesterisation. On the issue of reduced examination stress one of the students mentioned that,

The modular system enables us to write exams soon after the lectures. This means that the information will be fresh in our mind. This leads to higher student motivation and better performance in terms of both grades and pass rates. It also reduces stress in the sense that we write two or three modules per sitting instead of four or five modules that are studied every semester

A final year student who started her studies under semesterisation and migrated to modularization also upheld the system saying,

The modular system is friendly when it comes to examinations. Preparing for only two examinations at a time has been my best experience since I joined university. It gave us ample time to study, revise and discuss in preparation [sic]. It reduced the examination stress which characterised the semester system

Lecturers also upheld modularisation for enabling students to focus on fewer concepts hence it increases pass rates. With semesterisation, students would write exams after four months of learning. Modularisation allows those with weak retention to score relatively high. The lecturer went on to say,

"With modularisation students can write exams while the work is still fresh in their minds and this in turn result in favorable results"

Another lecturer also noted this advantage and said,

Invigilation is one stressful part of the lecturers' tasks. In the semesterisation, the exam period would stretch up to three weeks and this was stressful. Now that the students are sitting for lesser exams at a time, exams can be written in a week or two.

Upon being asked about the efficacy of modularisation, four lecturers were positive that if revisited with an open mind the modular system can be effective just like any other educational reform.

7.3 Negative Perceptions of Modularisation

Besides the four advantages highlighted above the participants also brought out the following disadvantages associated with the modular system. These challenges are discussed below.

7.3.1 Limited content coverage

As discussed under review of related literature modularisation is characterised by a division of the semester into quarters. Students are supposed to learn in three to four weeks and sit for examinations before coming back for the second half of the semester. This was highlighted as one of the major challenges associated with the system.

The students lamented that the three to four weeks that are set aside for the teaching and learning process are inadequate to cover the content,

Most of the time the lecturers only attend the first five to six days to introduce the concepts and leave much of the load on the students' shoulders. We are given presentations to do in class. Most of the presentations would be rushed and lack detail. Instead of having a deep understanding of the module, we as students always end up memorizing particular sections in order to write exams.

Another student who was a first year first semester student was quick to say the modular system is good on paper but the implementation is a 'disaster' to the students. He went on to say,

The modular system was poorly introduced. Before we even found our way around university, we were supposed to prepare for presentations, whilst still in the confusion exams were coming. Of course, I passed the modules but right now I do not really understand most of the concepts. I am in the second quarter now, and finding it difficult to refer back to the basic concepts that we covered in the first quarter.

The lecturers also supported that the modular system does not give ample time for teaching and learning. One of them had this to say,

This new system makes us to have hurried lectures and leaves students half- backed. We end up focusing on those topics that we know are examined.

The lecturer was actually afraid that the graduates might end up being rejected by the industry that is supposed to absorb them. Another of the lecturers said,

'Students do not have enough time to research. Rushing students to learn and write examinations in a space of 5 to 6 weeks is an educational joke.'

The lecturer went on to argue that the system does not only stress the students but also overwork the lecturer since according to him,

During this limited time, lecturers for the modules should give at least two assignments to be marked and feedback be given to students before the exam. Chero dhongi chairi harishandi nemutowo uyu (even animals, donkeys to be specific, do not work like that).

From the points raised in the responses it appears as if the lecturers find it difficult to cope with the long teaching periods which might lead to student fatigue. On the part of students they feel short changed as lecturers leave much of the work for them to research and work on in groups.

7.3.2 Modularisation overworks both the lecturers and students

In as much as one of the underlying principles of modularisation is to reduce work load for the lecturer and allow the time for research, community service, innovation and industrialisation, the Zimbabwean hybrid modular system seems to be doing the opposite as purported by the lecturers. One of the students indicated that preparation for examination in a modular system entails a lot of work.

Whilst it is good to study less modules per quarter, my classmates and I find it challenging to prepare for examinations in a short space of time. In a matter of four weeks we have to master the course content, write assignments and sit for examinations

Another student concurred with his colleague highlighting the challenges of having a presentation before you master the concepts,

I had sleepless nights preparing for a presentation. The lecturer had taught us for a week and we had to present on given topics with little guidance and time frame

Lecturers also highlighted work overload as the second major challenge after time constraint. One of the lecturers said,

In the case of our university some lecturers end up overlapping in the quarters by circumstances not by design, which defeats the whole imagined, perceived and concocted purpose. This does not leave time for other work requirements like research, innovation and community engagement. Running conventional and block classes as is with the school, overburdens lecturers.

This was supported by another lecturer who said,

The system does not give students enough time for research. Active learning means that the lecturer guides the learners and they research on the guided topics. This is difficult with the modular system. I ended up using the lecture method which is so tiring on the part of the lecturer and less helpful to the students

Both lecturers and students who have negative perception towards modularisation seemed to overlook the fact that the load is never the same in both quarters. If overloaded with teaching and learning in one quarter then it would mean that the lecturers and students would be less pressed in the next quarter.

7.3.3 Focus on examination rather than content coverage and internalisation

This challenge is closely associated with time constraints. Both lecturers and students agreed that due to time frame, focus of teaching and learning in a modular system will be on examination. One painful response was from a practical subject lecturer who said,

... the modular system is not good for practical oriented courses because the time is too packed to cover both theory and practical.

The Physical Education lecturer echoed the same sentiments. He lamented the death of semesterisation which allowed them to have ample time for practical lessons. (A lecturer who teaches Building Technology)

Another lecturer from the same department went on to say,

The system (modularisation) is slowly killing our once vibrant semester model, even though it had its challenges, it allowed us to have practical lessons with our students. Where we used to produce half backed students in semesterisation because of shortage of facilities, with the modular system we are now producing quarter backed ones'

On the part of the students, they indicated that modularisation does not allow them to revise and internalise content for future reference. One of the students said,

It will be impossible for us to concentrate on the gray parts of the previous module after the exam because we will need to concentrate on the forthcoming courses. Due to our busy academic schedule and constant state of anxiety over an exam in four weeks, we are unable to actively participate in any other activities on campus.

A first year student supported the point indicating that modular system does not allow them to internalise detail, which is basic in their degree programs,

I am in the second quarter now, and finding it difficult to refer back to the basic concepts that we covered in the first quarter.

One can conclude that the major challenge with modularisation here is implementation. Both students and lecturers need to be thoroughly oriented into the system before implementation. This would make both parties aware of the different roles they need to play in this curriculum reform.

7.3.4 Poor change management process

Most lecturers appreciated that change is good. In as much as the modular system has many advantages, its introduction was rushed and lecturers felt ambushed. The change agents did not take the stakeholders on board from the onset hence the gap between the policy and implementation. One of the lecturers said,

The problem with the system is that it was introduced without any contributions from the lecturers. Because of that as lecturers, we were bound to raise alarm and see the weakness.

The lecturers also highlighted that besides lack of consultation, the onset of modularisation was shrouded with inadequate resources.

There were electricity challenges in the school as the generator was constantly without fuel. At one point, it was broken down and it took long to repair. Hence, affecting the teaching-learning processes within a whole modular period.

Frequent electricity power cuts and poor internet connections were other challenges in all the three universities. Both lecturers and learners found it difficult to research, prepare for the lectures, academic presentations and scholarly assignments expected at an institution of higher learning. Numbers of learners overwhelmed computers in the laboratory as they got crashed due to the demands of the modular system.

Upon being asked for recommendations lecturers preferred semesterisation. One of them actually said, *'let's revert back to the semester model commencing this August.'* The other one was so radical and dismissed the system as malfunctioning, *'it simply doesn't work. Wherever it was tried, they have since abandoned it.'*

7.4 Neutral perceptions of Modularisation

Besides the participants who spoke vehemently for and against modularisation, there were two participants who sounded neutral about the change. One student said,

I do not really mind the system used for my university studies. I enrolled to learn and it is up to the university to determine how they will teach me. As long as other students are exposed to the same system then I am okay with it.

The lecturer who was impartial about modularisation is a very senior lecturer. He said,

I have been in this profession for decades; I have seen the introduction of semesterisation and now modularisation. Change will always come and I would want to encourage my juniors to embrace change with positive minds. The system will smoothen as we go.

8. Discussion

From the participants' responses, one can see that modularisation is not a total foe as pessimistic lecturers and students label it. As the Vice Chancellor of the University of Zimbabwe indicated (Gora, 2023), some of the lecturers who shun modularisation do so because of their fear of change. In the context of the SJT, it can be argued that pre-existing attitudes or the anchor position (semesterisation) is the central determinant of how the stakeholders judge and perceive modularisation. The stakeholders have looked at modularisation through the lens of semesterisation hence have failed to see the advantages stated above; manageable workloads, less examination stress, better time management and enhanced focus on fewer modules. These advantages, if well manipulated can make modularisation work in the Zimbabwean higher education system.

On the other hand, responses revealing negative perceptions showed that the major cause of disagreement is on time constraints. This challenge also leads to limited content coverage and lack of internalization of concepts before sitting for examinations. These gray areas give the detractors of the modular system the voice to say it focuses more on the examinations rather than life long teaching and learning. It does not give the students time to internalise concepts before sitting for the exams and apply them later in their life situations.

The issue of change management also comes to play. According to Vroom and Yetton as cited in Aydin (2017), change management has three main factors. These are; time factor, decision quality and team commitment. Emphasis here is on team commitment. Some curriculum decisions like the shift from semesterisation to modularisation have a major impact on the team (lecturers and students). If the decision is likely to have an effect on the team, it is best to use a collaborative process. This improves the quality of the decision, and the leader will likely deliver a successful result faster through member buy in. The responses from lecturers has some signs of resistance emanating from lack of involvement in the decision-making and the curriculum change process.

In summary, students' responses revealed that modularisation has its own advantages and disadvantages. If the administration and the lecturers commit themselves on improving and

perfecting the system it can be appropriate for students in higher education.

9. Conclusions and Recommendations

It has been noted that modularisation has a number of progressive advantages that enables learners to achieve higher grades because they write their examinations whilst the content is still fresh in their minds. It also reduces stress by allowing the students time to concentrate on few courses at a time. However, the implementation is shrouded with challenges emanating from weak change management system, which lacks stakeholder involvement in decision-making. Because lecturers were not well prepared for the change and implementation of the reform, the challenges are overrated and end up overshadowing the advantages of modularisation

Based on the research findings, it is suggested that as modularization involves several stakeholders, it is necessary to raise awareness among key players in higher education, such as lecturers and students, to encourage their active involvement and contribution. The lecturers' assistance could lead to the much-needed outcomes. Prior to making any adjustments, it is also imperative that the much-needed resources—such as energy and internet access—be deployed. The change might not be executed in the manner and with the goals for which it was intended if these crucial resources are not available. It's also necessary to devise reasonable course loads for instructors so they can dedicate themselves to other facets of Education 5.0. Effort should be made to ensure that lecturer-teaching load fit into one quarter of the semester so that the other quarter is left for research, innovation and community development. Lastly, there is need for effective e-learning platforms to allow students to access course outlines, course notes and even carry out research before they come for the 4-6weeks contact time. This will enable both the lecturer and the students to focus on the gray areas rather than introduce the modules on offer when they meet for face-to-face teaching.

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